

THE MURNGIN

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The clans are of basic importance. They are the largest units of solidarity, and open conflict never occurs within them, as it would not between a man's clan and his wife's and mother's clan. It is through his clan that a man establishes his totemic relations and identifies himself with the sacred world by virtue of a mystical experience of his father. The mother is supposed to be spiritually fertilized by the entrance into her uterus of the infant's soul when it has come from the child's father's totemic well. Many ethnologists have insisted that the Australian aborigines have no knowledge of physiological conception. Although I held this opinion during the first part of my field work, I later came to the conclusion that knowledge of procreation is general to the Murngin but is considered of little importance.⁴

The blood feud is forever present and tends to kill a sufficient number of young men to allow the system of polygyny⁵ to function. The Murngin have developed a number of well-constructed types of warfare which form dramatic episodes in the several chains of feuds linking the dead generations of the past to those of the living.

The moiety⁶ is a still larger unit than the clan, dividing the sixty-odd clans into two groups which intermarry. By the device of the moiety, the whole of the life of the Murngin, as well as nature, is placed in two opposing groups called Yiritja and Dua.

A final important structure in Murngin society is the age-grading⁷ institution. It divides, first, the men from the women (see page 131, Age Grading) on the basis of those who are initiated into the mysteries and those who are not, and then redivides the men on an age-graded scale based primarily on the place a man achieves within the rest of his social organization through *rites de passage*.

Within this social configuration the life of each Murngin male goes through an exact cycle. The first life crisis occurs when the Murngin soul, through the father's mystic experience, leaves the totemic well and enters the womb of the mother. By circumcision around the age of six to eight years the individual passes from the social status of a woman to that of a man. When at about the age of eighteen he achieves parenthood and is shown his totems for the first time, he goes to another, higher status; and to a still higher when, at about thirty-five, he sees the high totems. At death he passes through a very elaborate mortuary rite, returns to his totemic well, and the circle is complete. The personality before birth is purely spiritual; it becomes almost completely profane or unspiritual in the earlier period of its

⁴ See pages 23-25.

⁵ See Glossary of Technical Terms.

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76/ life when it is classed socially with the females, gradually becomes more and more ritualized and sacred as the individual grows older and approaches death, and at death once more becomes completely spiritual and sacred. This is the life of all Murngin men. A woman, on the other hand, passes out of the sacred existence of the unborn to the profane existence of the born and living, and back again to the sacred existence of the dead; but little sacred progress is made during her lifetime.

562 Obviously the principle of the social bifurcation of the sexes has been
 561 used to create the lowest status, that of women and children. The women's group remains comparatively undifferentiated, while the men's group becomes highly segmented and graded through participation in the totemic mysteries. The age-grading structure largely controls the degree of participation a man has in his society. The older men exercise their control largely through their power to say whether or not a man can go from one age grade to another. It is only they who possess the knowledge which makes up the totemic ideology.

561 The participation of a Murngin in the age-grading structure revolves around, first, his position in the immediate family structure, and, secondly, his place in the ceremonial mysteries. The life of man is divided into a number of stages marked by the *rites de passage*. The life crises of an individual, including birth, maturity, and death, are set off by elaborate rituals. These rituals correspond roughly to a man's position in the family structure. When he is circumcised he moves out of his family of orientation^a into a men's camp; and at the time he creates his own family, that of procreation,^a he moves into higher age grades by seeing his totems in a series of rituals. Chart I, page 11, expresses in summary fashion the relation of man's place in the social organization to his place in the age-graded ceremonial life.

562 The first principle of age grading, the sexual bifurcation by which
 156 women are excluded from participation in the totemic mysteries, immediately limits female behavior in the society and tends to simplify their personalities. The man's social personality, on the contrary, expands and becomes more complex by his participation in the various elaborate age-graded rituals. There seems to be considerable evidence for a relationship between this and a man's comparatively complex technological behavior and a woman's more simple type. The Murngin man handles more complicated tools and weapons, and uses more complex techniques in making and using them than does his female kinswoman;

^a See Glossary of Technical Terms.

CHAPTER IV

AGE GRADING

THE male's life cycle is divided on the basis of definite social groupings ordinarily spoken of as age grades. Although these social changes which take place in a man's life are at more or less definite physical age levels for all of the men, purely social factors have an equal importance in determining a man's status within the age grades. 561 ●

Age grading is a generalizing process that cuts across the whole group, and is generically connected with the immediate families of procreation and orientation. Status in the age grades is closely correlated with a man's family position.

The peoples of the different areas apply various terms to each of the age grades. The ones used here are those which seem to be in more general use by all the Murngin. Children up until the age of six or eight are called dji-mer-ku-li regardless of sex; but as soon as he is circumcised a boy may be called by a term that denotes the ceremony which was used for his circumcision. The boy who is circumcised by the Djungguan is called par-tung-o, the name of the ground where the bushes are put in the outside camp and where his blood falls. Sometimes the names mo-lu-lu and mor-da are used for the Djungguan initiates.—This circumcision name is used from the time a boy is cut until he is dead, but is looked upon as an age-grading term to separate a male from the uncircumcised group below him. Sometimes an uncut boy is called da-pi gar-da-ko or yo-to gar-da-ko (foreskin) from his birth until he is painted for his initiation. 561 85✓

Wangurri married men who belong to the age grade above the younger single men are called mir-ri ma-mi, "camp." The Djambar-pingu people call an as yet childless married man wonga mirri, "camp-man," which distinguishes him as a man who still has an attenuated relation with his family of orientation and has not yet established his family of procreation, who has been initiated into the various ceremonials that represent the attainment of a mature age-grade status, and who is in the main married people's camp and not 561 885 591

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561 in the boys'.—During his entire life a man has age-segregating terms
885 applied to him.
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A small girl is called mielk yoto (woman child, or small child).
561 A girl with breasts and without a child is referred to as wirkul mielk
(breasts woman). From first pregnancy until death a woman is called
gung-mun, literally, giver.

Very old men are more or less informally given an age-grade status
and grouped under the term or-ung-o, and old women are called
kar-kar-ang (white hair).

The tests of a man's ordinary status are (1) his responsibility in
blood feuds and (2) the possession of children. The tests of a man's
ritual status are (1) the areas of the sacred grounds into which he can
penetrate and (2) the parts of the graded rituals in which he can par-
ticipate. Although these two categories of status do not always coincide,
they usually do, for it is felt that they should. Further, the effect of the
ritual taboos of the different grades decidedly alters a man's ordinary
participation in the community's daily round of events.

857 Small children, boys and girls, accompany their mothers to the lily
857 swamps or oyster beds. They are carried astride their mothers' necks
and put their hands around the mother's forehead. (This method is
used in the initiation rituals when the little boys are carried by the
men, to indicate the age status of the neophytes.)

857 Little girls continue to accompany their mothers and help them at
868 first as a part of their play. Gradually they learn their part in the
482 woman's division of labor. The division between men and women is
concretely expressed by the manner in which they carry their personal
baskets. The women place the string handle of the basket over their
foreheads and allow the basket to hang down their backs. The men
place the string handle over their arms and wear the basket hanging
from their shoulders.

857 In due time the small boys form little groups and play by them-
selves such games as throwing mud balls at one another, throwing
slender sticks in the manner of their fathers, and they indulge in many
kinds of improvised and not very formalized play.

Young boys, before and after circumcision, carry small fish spears
with them, but do not use spear-throwers. They play along the water's
edge with the spears, and occasionally strike a small fish, developing
their throwing technique to considerable accuracy. At this period they

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make quite a point of carrying their personal baskets under their arms in the manner of mature men. 857

When large animals such as kangaroos, sea turtles, or emus are harpooned or speared and are being prepared for the stone fires by the older men, the little boys stand about and watch, edging as close as they can and being constantly warned to get back. Meanwhile they quarrel among themselves over the tidbits given them, e.g., the shells of the turtles from which they pick bits of meat.

A boy remains with his family of orientation until he is six or eight years of age, when he is circumcised, leaves his family, and goes to live with the boys of his own age and those who are older in a male group presided over by an older man (or men) who does not possess a wife. This does not mean that he is not in constant contact with the members of his own family. It is felt to be wrong, however, for the young man to live in his parents' camp after he reaches this age because he will be aware of their sexual relations and will learn ways of behavior not proper for a boy who has not taken a wife. Sexual relations between married people are carried on in the bush in the daytime and in camp at night. In camp they lie in such a position that they will not be noticed by their camp mates. "It is all right for children to watch, for they don't know what's happening, but when a boy gets older he sees, and then he says, 'That's good for me, too.' He goes and gets a young girl, maybe a galle to him, and they go into the bush." "When he stays in the big camp he sees too many women. If sometimes you see a small boy from the men's camp sit down in the camp with the women, he hasn't learned which way to behave proper." 591 834 [33]

The sister taboos are put into force at this same period and are active deterrents in keeping the boy away from his own camp, since the young girls remain with their parents until they are taken by their spouses. 591 593

The youths are supposed to eat in their (boys', unmarried men's) camp and sleep there, not going around with women. The boys' camp is the place for them to learn the proper etiquette in their conduct with men and women. A boy is not supposed to look "hard" at a woman. Whenever a man stares at a woman he is thought to have designs upon her. "If a boy looks hard at that girl she says to herself, 'What does he look at me for that way? I think he wants to play with me.' She goes and talks then and makes trouble." 591 861

When the younger circumcised boys are put in the unmarried men's 561 591

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● 561 camp there is a definite recognition of age. They are seen no longer
 591 as babies but as growing boys; but if the young men stay in the men's
 camp after they grow a beard it is then not so much a matter of age
 grading as such as it is a single status that is being recognized, since
 they are now at the proper age for marriage. It is marriage which takes
 males out of the men's camp and puts them in the general camp. The
 young men's camp recognizes sex, marriage status, and age. A large
 number of men who are past the adolescence ceremonies, that is, the
 561 totem-seeing rituals, continue in the young men's camp because they
 591 have yet to obtain a wife. Further proof that marriage is a final
 885 criterion of status is found in the fact that men who travel without
 484 their women stay in the men's camp, since at that moment they are
 single men and not to be classed as married. The only deviation from
 this of which the writer knows is that occasionally a man will stay in a
 brother's camp if visiting outside his own clan's territory.

561 In the young men's camp the oldest man takes charge and reprimands all wrongdoers with the assistance of the near relatives of the
 867 offending youths. He also gives them instructions and advice about
 869 the totemic emblems when they have seen them, and informs them
 887 on the tribal mores, tradition, and mythology. At times there may be
 more than one old man in the men's camp. The division of authority
 and power is then based on the personalities of the old men, the more
 dominant achieving a greater control over the boys. Such authority is
 more explicit here than one finds it in almost any other part of the
 Murngin behavior, with the possible exception of the ceremonial ritual
 when the leader decides when and where it shall be held.

224 His near female relatives carry the bones of the animal when a
 boy makes his first kill. It is supposed to be done for all the animals a
 male kills until he has a baby. The bones of the animal or bird are
 painted with red ochre. If a boy kills a turkey or other large bird, he
 does not pick it up but leaves it, returns to the camp and tells some
 old man. He does not say the name of the turkey but calls out
 "Ka-ok," the sound the turkey makes, to tell his listener what has
 happened so that he can pick it up. If a young man finds a porcupine
 (echidna), he will not kill it but goes to tell an old man of his find.
 [262] If it is killed, he cannot eat it. After they have been carried by the
 women, the bones of the larger animals are put in a basket made by
 the mother for this purpose. The basket is placed near the camp and
 no one touches it, for it would anger the relatives of the boy and a fight
 would follow.

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For the purposes of the blood feud all children, including boys 858 until the time they have a beard, are classed as women; it is felt wrong 628 to kill very young men, who are usually not allowed to accompany the older men on fighting expeditions.

When a man sees the python totem for the first time he must have a moustache and beard. The young men who have not been initiated into the Djungguan by seeing the python totemic emblem are allowed to sit back of the brush hut where the totem is kept. If they are able to look through the wall, they must keep their heads down so that they cannot see what is inside. They are allowed to call out at the end of each song in the chorus with the older men. 561 ● 883

When the time comes for them to paint for the last Djungguan ceremony, these young men who have not seen the totem go off to a little depression in the ground or behind some bushes some distance from the old men's camp and put their decorations on by themselves.

Men obtain their wives at almost any age after they have reached maturity, the first usually when the beard begins, and the others at any time after that through the operation of the levirate or because promised by their mother's brothers. For example, several old men over sixty had several female children promised them as wives. The best time for a boy to marry is when his moustache appears, when he "looks like a proper man," and not until then. His father and mother, as well as father-in-law, exert pressure on him to see that he remains single, and they also observe his behavior to make sure that he does not have contact with a girl before that, although usually their efforts are unsuccessful. "Gawel is on the lookout and no business happens with that girl. He says to the father and mother, 'I'll listen for you people too.'" A young man said to me, "We do not sleep with girls before we are married because we are afraid of the old people. Sometimes a girl who belongs to another man says yes and we do. If it is found out the proper husband raises a row, and maybe her father. Sometimes a boy gets killed this way and sometimes they only cut him until the blood comes" (in a makarata). 582 836

The proper time for a girl to marry is when her breasts first start developing. 582

In the married people's camp the husband and wife "own" the hut because they both participate in the making of it and both live in it. The woman ordinarily keeps it clean and throws away the garbage which collects about the floor. Usually she makes the fire and it is her duty to bring in the wood. It is also her duty to cook the shell 462 [356]

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462 food, yams, and other vegetable food. This is generally done communally by the women in the bush where the food is gathered, but women also cook within the camp. Men cook the larger animals, [55] prepare the stone ovens, place the large chunks of meat in the fire, and tend the food to see that it is being properly treated.—It is considered as within the bounds of propriety for the man to move about the camp [56] at night in the way he pleases, but "all women must stay in the house when the men are at home."

85/ Definite taboos are removed from a man's diet when he becomes a father (see pages 68 and 69), as from a woman's when she becomes a 262 mother or too old to have children. After the birth of the child, the parents paint themselves. He takes the bones of his first kills from the basket which had been made by his mother and carries them some distance from the camp. Here a hollow log is cut in the same shape as that for the bones of a dead man, and the bones are put inside it. The "coffin" is put up in the camp in the same manner as a dead man's carved hollow-log coffin. The people who have had meat from the boy while he could not eat put presents of food in his clan's symbolic well, made while he was painting himself.—If a man had eaten [626] of the tabooed foods while in the lower age grades, it is supposed he would become weak and unable to throw a spear in a spear fight; in a makarata it is likely that a spear will go into his leg, it will swell up and his flesh grow rotten while the spear is in his leg. This will also happen if the bones of the animals killed are not put in a hollow log and treated properly. If a young childless man ate porcupine, he would not grow up because "porcupine is a short one."

85/ The reason given for the release from the taboos (see also page 69) is that the young man "becomes more quiet then and does not run about everywhere after other women. He stays in one place and looks out for his own galle and children." In reality, his social personality has grown so that his actual relatives include descending relatives as well as ascending. The birth of a child heightens his emotional ties with his relatives who have children who will marry his children and, in all, puts him in a different status, which is expressed by the release of the food taboos. All this underlying thought agrees with the Murngin idea that marriage does not become complete and permanent until a child is born.

56/ Age grading in Murngin societies is highly ritualistic and controls a man's religious life far more than it does his ordinary daily existence. A man's religious knowledge and his understanding of the sacred

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totemic lore, with the associated myths and rituals, are dependent upon how far he has been initiated into the sacred mysteries. The initiations elevate him from a lower and more profane existence to a higher and more sacred plane and mark his transition from one age grade to a higher and older one. Age grading, then, controls the degree of sacred participation a man has within the community.

The older men are the final repositories of all the sacred knowledge which can be obtained only by their willingness to initiate the younger men of the lower ranks into their own group. The older men, therefore, by virtue of the age-grade system, control the younger men fairly effectively. It is partly through the exercise of the sanction of refusing to allow a man to be initiated into certain ceremonies, or threatening to do so, that they can maintain the effectiveness of Murngin gerontocracy. In addition, the old men, felt to be in closer touch with the clan ancestors and totems through their deeper participation in the sacred myths and rituals, effect discipline by invoking the religious sanctions: dire things will happen to men who commit acts the old men frown on and which offend the totemic spirits and ancient ancestors. For example, a man who starts a fight or who commits adultery during a ceremony may be told that his real ancestors and his totemic ancestors will not allow the totemic fish soul to enter his wife, she will be childless—a thing all Murngin men would make every effort to avoid. The offending young man may also be told that the totemic ancestors will not come to direct him to his totemic water hole if he is killed in a fight, or that they will refuse to answer him in a time of need, as when he is in a fight or drowning.

The first effective age grading in the lives of the Murngin occurs when the entire group is sexually bifurcated. The young boy is circumcised and immediately enters the portals of a sacred realm which is forever taboo to his sister, promised wives, and the entire female population of a tribe. The pidgin-English expression found generally among Australian aborigines, "make him a young man," describes what takes place in the minds of the natives: that is, the boy is taken out of the social status of female and put in the social category of male by the use of certain rites of passage. His later initiations take him spiritually further and further from his original profane innocence of the uncircumcised child, where sociologically he is treated as a woman, and they translate him grade by grade into the group's mysteries. The young girl grows into womanhood and continues in the ordinary world with only an outsider's knowledge of the mysteries

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561 which center in the men's ground and overflow during parts of the
562 rituals into the general camp where her world is centered.

The principle of sex, then, has been used to organize a status group, with the women and small children of either sex in one group and the initiated men in another. The women's group remains ritually undifferentiated in a status sense except for a tendency to give women near 562 or in the menopause preference over younger women in those ceremonies in which women participate. For example, in the Gunabibi the old women beat the ground to stop Muit, and in the Djungguan it is felt to be more appropriate and effective for older women to dance around the warngaitja than for men to do so. This corresponds with the lifting of part of the feeling of taboo around the mother-in-law after she loses many of her secondary sexual characteristics and "gets to be an old woman and looks all the same as a man."

561 Murngin age grading is largely a religious phenomenon consisting of a series of rites of passage from one age group to another in the life 761 cycle of the individual. It seems, therefore, nearer the truth of Murngin thought to treat the life of the individual as the complete entity it appears to be in the thought of the culture. Each Murngin's beginning is in the sacred totemic well of his ancestors, and each Murngin's end is within the same subterranean depths. His first status is that of the unborn child in the form of a small fish which exists with others of his kind beside the totemic spirits of the clan, the totemic mythological ancestors, the ancient clan dead, and those who have recently died. He [626] is under the control of his ancestors and the totem, and his passage from the world of the unborn to that of the living depends on the good behavior of his parents, particularly of his father. The Murngin think of this from the parents' point of view and conduct their lives more carefully because of the fear of childlessness.

561 The Murngin baby comes from the totem well through a religious experience of the father, since it is the father who is in touch with 761 the totem world of which the mother is supposed to have no knowledge. The father's mystical dream experience is itself a kind of rite of 787 passage of the unborn and begins the child's socialization. The father's announcement to the mother of the child's arrival (frequently, it must 851 be admitted, after she has reported her pregnancy to the father, who has kept silent, he says, to test the validity of his experience) changes the father's age-grade status. It removes certain ritualistic food taboos and definitely establishes his place in the older men's group. This means, then, that the father-child reciprocal functions as a unit: the

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consummation of his family of procreation through his first child's "birth" effects the father's spiritual birth into a recognized higher status in the community age grouping, and simultaneously the new being is taken into the lowest age grade. 561 761 787 851

As an old man, the Murngin learns the final mysteries of life by seeing the most esoteric of the totems. Ultimately he dies and assumes a new social status, and by the mourning rite of passage enters his last social grouping, for he still retains a social personality of his own as long as he is in the memory of his group. His ultimate fate is loss of social personality when he is forgotten as an individual and remembered only as an undifferentiated part of a long line of clan ancestors and is absorbed in the general sacredness of the clan well. The sacred power of the clan well derives in part from the knowledge of the souls of the long and the recent dead dwelling within it. The dead soul, when it is ceremonially ushered into the totemic well, is a spiritual part of the man's or woman's participation in the land of the living. The woman's spiritual existence, although not primary and direct as thought of by the Murngin, is nevertheless real and identifiable, for she has a number of sacred totemic names known to her father and brothers, she comes from the totemic water hole as a fish, and vicariously, and to some extent directly, participates in all the sacred totemic rituals. Her partial participation in these rituals which are enacted outside the men's ground also gives her a certain amount of ritualization. 561 761 778

As a man becomes more deeply integrated into his daily community life, that is, when he becomes old enough to go on expeditions as a responsible member of the blood feud and to be held accountable by the enemies of the clan as a part of his group, and when he marries and has children and extends his kinship personality by primary contacts, he at the same time grows deeper and deeper into his esoteric existence and becomes more deeply learned in the rituals and the sacred language. 561

A review of the chapter on economics and technology quickly convinces one that men make and use the greater number of the more complex tools, weapons, and implements. If all the complexities of the technological apparatus as a part of the society's adaptation to its natural environment were charted, each process receiving a line symbolizing its part in the general technical behavior, it would become apparent that the greater the complexity of the technology, the greater the participation of the men in it, and the simpler the technological processes, the more women participate. There is a possible correlation 462 562 561

462 between the women's restricted social participation in such parts of
562 the culture as ritual and myth and their simple technological be-
561 havior. Technological behavior obviously is connected with the age-
grading situation in Murngin society. It is impossible to say which
causes which—both are part of the male-female social dichotomy. There
can be no question, however, but that the general profane participation
of the women in the technological and economic life of the people is
just as restricted when it comes to participating in the more elaborate
and highly skilled technical processes as it is in the ritual of the tribe;
and that the men's highly developed participation in Murngin ritual
finds its counterpart in their greater participation in economic and
technological processes which demand a greater degree of manual
dexterity and skill and are far more complex techniques. The most
elaborate and only complex technique a woman uses is that of making
baskets. All other processes which she uses are comparatively simple,
with the possible exception of helping to construct some of the bark
houses. The same is true of her economic behavior. The digging of
yams, the gathering of shells, of roots, of fruit, are probably the simplest
of all the economic processes found in Murngin society. It is with
these things she is chiefly engaged. Among men the harpooning of
turtles—which includes such elaborate technical background as the
making of a canoe, its sailing and proper use, the construction of the
harpoon and its use—is probably at the maximum end of Murngin
technological complexity. As a boy grows up his participation in the
use of these techniques grows, paralleled by his ritual growth.

561 In other words, as he generally extends his social personality further
into the group in his daily life, he is, at definite intervals, admitted
into a deeper understanding of the religious life. If in no other way,
he becomes aware of this by being part of the group which forces
the younger men through these same rites. He realizes that he enters
many of the ceremonies as a part of his older age group, and that he
is becoming part of the Python-spirit, as when he gives his blood to
the Python's Djungguan rite or when he dances with the sacred blood
on him. This identification with the essential holiness or final sacred
power necessitates, he realizes, careful conduct and a minute regulation
[626
753] of his daily behavior, for he risks profaning this spirit within himself
and resultant sickness or death. The best medicine man among the
Murngin told several of his patients that Muit was angry and had
made them sick because they failed to see the Gunabibi through to
its conclusion—an affront to the Python. The men's group separates

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farther and farther from that of the women and uninitiated children. 56/ ●
It is within this mentality that the essential elements of Murngin age grading have their foundations.

The meanings of the age-grade structure are further elaborated in the section in Chapter XIII, pages 443-450.

THE AGE GRADE CHART

The accompanying chart is designed to show the general relation 56/1
between a man's position in his family and his corresponding place 59/1

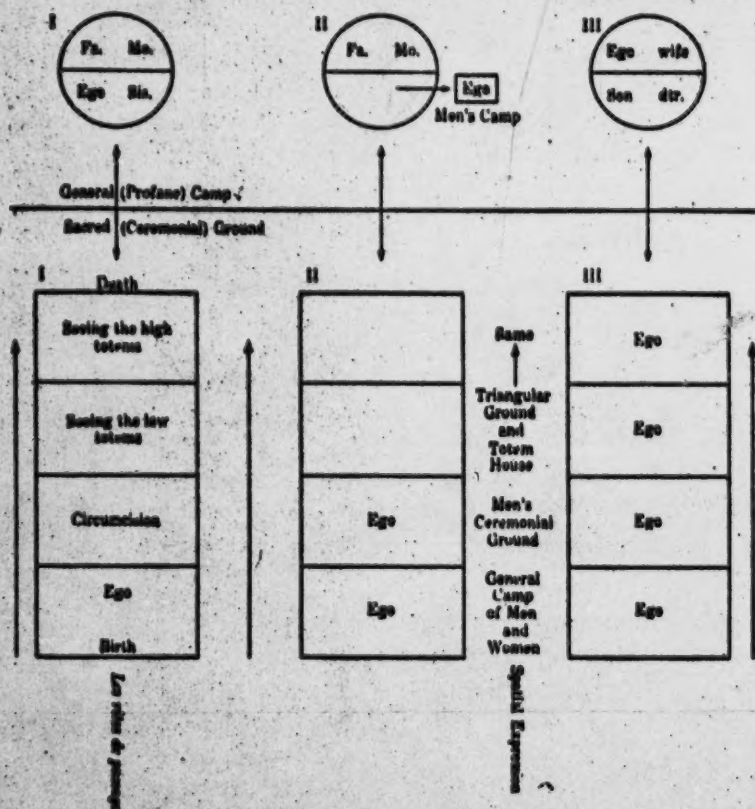


CHART IX.—THE RELATION OF EGO AND HIS FAMILIES TO HIS SPATIAL POSITION IN THE CAMP AND HIS AGE GRADE STATUS

in the age grading during the various periods of his life. The family structure, represented by circles, is separated from the age-grade "lad."

56/ ders" by a vertical line. The upper section of the chart represents the
59/ general or profane camp, and the lower section the sacred or ceremonial
ground. The arrows pointing toward both the family circle and the
age-grade ladder, and running through the line separating the sacred
and profane areas, are devices to show the reciprocal relation existing
between the two structures. For example, Family I is shown to be in
relation to Age-grade Chart I, but one sees that at this period ego, the
individual, is placed within the family in which he was born and in
the lower generation. If one then turns to Age-grade Ladder I, one
sees that ego is placed at the bottom, between birth and the line of
circumcision. In the next family, II, one sees that ego has moved out
of the lower generation of the family into the men's camp but has
not yet established a family of his own, while in Age-grade Ladder II
one sees that he participates not only in the group below the circum-
cision level but also in the group above and up to the line where he
sees the lower totems. In the final family circle, III, ego is in the upper
generation, his children in the lower, and the reciprocating arrow
shows that in the age-grade ladder he has passed through the stage
of seeing the lower totems, and, as an older man, has gone to the
top of the ladder by seeing the high totems.

By the device of placing ego in the four spaces we can see that his
participation is much fuller than it was in II, and we can visually
determine the enormous growth of a man's ceremonial activities from
the time when he was in but one segment in the first age-grade ladder.

Each of the rungs of the first ladder has been named, from the
bottom to the top, respectively, birth, circumcision, seeing the low
totems, and seeing the high totems. In the space between Ladders II
and III each of the areas between the rungs of the age grade has been
named from the point of view of its general spatial expression of the
tribe's ceremonial grounds.

In general, we can say there is a correspondence between (1) the
relation of ego's family of orientation and ego's spatial position in the
general camp (see the position of ego in relation to the family on the
upper part of the age-grade chart) and (2) his ritual status and degree
of penetration into the men's ground. Although these two are separate
to a considerable degree in the Murngin mind, nevertheless they closely
parallel each other. When a boy is old enough to be circumcised, he is
initiated by this means into the men's group (see the lower half of
the age-grade chart where the "steps in the ladder" represent the
different parts of the rites of passage) and enters the outer grounds

AGE GRADING

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but does not dance in the triangular ground (see the openings in the "ladder" generally classed as spatial expression); at the same time he moves to the boys' and unmarried men's camp. When a man is married he starts living openly in the main camp with his wife and becomes a wonga mirri. At approximately this time he sees Yurlunggur. At a later period, sometimes after only a year or two and other times much later, he gives his blood to Yurlunggur. In the Narra ceremonies a man tends to be much older before he sees the higher totems, which, ordinarily speaking, means he has had children or he is biologically in middle age. Although the initiation symbols vary for the older and less well-defined statuses, the fundamental division between men and woman which usually identifies a man with the male group is in all initiations symbolized by the rite of circumcision, whether it be an element in the Djunguan, Marndiella, or other ritual. The circumcised penis has the mark of the snake upon it because the python has taken the foreskin and by the operation the blood has been let for the Great Father—it is a social mark on an individual.¹

¹ An autobiographical account of a Murngin native is in preparation which will be a statement of age grading as it is seen and felt by the individual experiencing it.

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"Run and get some paper bark and make a basket," said the older Wawilak man. 773

They gathered two baskets of blood, and went to the dance grounds. They made a bush house on part of the ground that represents the snake's tail.

"You take all the hawk's feathers, bush cotton, and this blood, and we'll paint ourselves. You do this, and I shall go cut a hollow log and make a Yurlunggur trumpet."

Each did his task. The hollow ridgepole from the Wawilak sisters' house was used for the trumpet totemic emblem of Yurlunggur.

The sun went down. They left the blood till morning. They slept, and while they were in a deep sleep they dreamed of what the two women sang and danced when they were trying to keep Yurlunggur from swallowing them. The Wawilak women came back as spirits and taught the two men the Djungguan songs and dances that are for the outside general camp, and the inside ones that are for the men's camp. They told the men the way to do the Marndiella, Gunabibi and Ulmark ceremonies. They sang Yurlunggur and Mui. The men slept on and dreamed that Yurlunggur brought out all the iguanas from the Mirrimina well. (See Djungguan ritual, pages 283 to 284.)

The two sisters said to men, "This is all now. We are giving you this dream so you can remember these important things. You must never forget these things we have told you tonight. You must remember every time each year these songs and dances. You must paint with blood and feathers for Marndiella, Gunabibi and Djungguan. You must dance all the things we saw and named on our journey, and which ran away into the well."

After the men danced the new dances and ceremonies for the first time they went back to their own country. "We dance these things now, because our Wongar ancestors learned them from the two Wawilak sisters."

THE DJUNGGUAN CEREMONY

The great ceremonies all take place in the dry season, and always on the men's ceremonial grounds. Actual participation is only by initiated men, although the women, not allowed in the ceremonial grounds and not thought of by the men as in the ceremony, play an important rôle. 796

All the ceremonies are associated with age grading, as being participated in by men initiated into certain age grades, or serving to initiate a man into a higher status; and all are associated with moiety or clan totems. 156/ 614 616]

All the rituals have ceremonial leaders. The participants paint themselves with sacred totemic designs and usually employ feather orna- 796 302.

MURNGIN TOTEMISM

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Djungguan is called Wongar Dal. Wongar is the totemic spirit itself. 778
It is one of the beings which once lived in the earth and now lives in the subterranean waters. It is also the spirit or essence which enters the totemic emblem, so that when the old men's camp is called Wongar Wonga it means totemic spirit's camp. It is here that the totemic emblem is kept when it is not in use during the ceremony. Since the essence of the totemic spirit is supposed to be within the emblem, the camp literally is the place where Wongar lives. The young men who do not belong to the upper age group are told that he actually stays in this place.

The triangular dance ground, where the various dramatic dances 852
are presented before the initiates, represents a snake's body and is also supposed to have the Wawilak sisters and their children inside it. It is supposed to face toward the southeast.

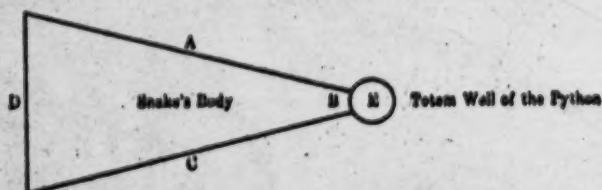


FIGURE 3.—THE TRIANGULAR DANCE GROUND OF THE SNAKE'S BODY

The old men are saturated with all the ritual power that pertains 778
to the totem and its emblems, and the old men's camp therefore takes on a taboo quality, partly because the old men take maraiin there. 561
To a lesser degree, this is true of the camp where the circumcised men are allowed to go. They, to a lesser extent, have assimilated some of the ritual power which allows them to be on this part of the camp ground. Even the women have a minimum of maraiin: they know a part of the ritual tradition; they dance around the warngaitja; they help in dramatizing the removal of the boy from the uncircumcised age group to the circumcised; they paint themselves with red ochre; and, of course, fundamentally they are Murngin social personalities. [562]

The triangular dance ground is made by clearing off a smooth space 852
and heaping a line of earth about ten inches high around its periphery. The earth is then covered with green leaves from any variety of tree. The end (D) is twenty to twenty-five feet across, and from D to B is some forty to fifty feet. A and C represent the side of the snake. "The Wawilak sisters said that (A) was Yiritja moiety and that (C) was Dua

A BLACK CIVILIZATION

773 body and it is usually thought of as having the women and children
852 inside it. Frequently the green leaves surrounding it are said to be the
women after he has spewed them up. During one of the many times
I was told the story of the Wawilak women, when the narrator got
to the moment in the drama when the sisters were seeking something
more powerful to stop Yurlunggur and they sang menstrual blood,
he interrupted himself and said, "When the dance place for the
Djungguan is square and not triangular it is a camp of these women.
When it is this way [triangular] it is a snake's body. At Mirrimina
you can see the holes where all the sons of Yurlunggur crawled around
the two women and you can see the dance ground where the snake
fell after swallowing them."

852 E. THE BLOODLETTING

- 778 1. Yurlunggur is painted.
796 2. Yurlunggur is blown over the men who give their blood; the
304 names of the ancestors are called.

1. All during this section of the ceremony the totemic trumpet is
kept in the old men's camp or in the specially built ceremonial hut
(the python's totem well). During the preliminary stages of this sec-
tion Yurlunggur is painted.

852 2. On the day before the circumcision a bloodletting ceremony
796 takes place in the old men's camp. The blood is to be used as an
304 adhesive substance to hold the birds' down and native cotton to the
56 dancers' bodies. Before a man offers his blood for the first time Yur-
lunggur is blown all over his body; after the first time it is unusual.
This ceremony is one of the ritual methods by which a man is ad-
mitted into the higher order of the men's association. Though it is
not obligatory for him to go through this rite as it is for the young
boy to go through the circumcision ceremony, all of the men feel it
their privilege to contribute their blood either the first time they enter
the old men's grounds or at some later period. Most men, while still
in their prime, give their blood every time this ceremony is held.

852 Here is an account of one of the many blood sacrifice rituals wit-
796 nessed by the author:

304 The old men sing over the man, Lika. The "mouth" of Yurlunggur
533 is placed against him and the trumpeter blows all over his body while
the trumpet's notes keep time with the slow rhythm of the singing
sticks of the leader.

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and acts generally in imitation of this bird. When he reaches the boys, he bows at their feet. The leader walks along beside him beating his singing sticks and singing the taboo names of this little bird. Two men dance a grotesque step which makes them appear deformed. They are mokoi trickster spirits. 852
535

Two "wallabys" now arrive, hopping along on their hands and feet and imitating other actions of the wallaby. Following them a large gray kangaroo (kai-tjim-bal) and a black-faced kangaroo appear. The last falls down and sleeps; he is considered a very sleepy creature by the natives.

A group of dogs come out crawling on their bellies. They howl like dingoes.

The dance of the mopuke owl and the bush rat is next. The rat crawls in on his hands and knees. The owl, squatting on his haunches, follows after, carrying leaves in each hand. He pounces upon the rat, but the leader kicks him over. This is repeated a number of times, and causes much laughter among the onlookers.

Brush turkeys next appear, and fires are lit all along the dance ground and back in the bush as when the natives try to smoke out these birds in hunting them.

The Dua honeybee dance follows. Two parallel lines of men about six feet apart start at the direction of the leader about one hundred and fifty yards back in the bush. They dance in a rapid rhythm, the members of each line crossing over and taking the place of the other group. When they reach the dance ground they all lie flat on their backs in a long line with the head of one dancer lying between the legs of the one ahead of him.

The stone kangaroos dance again, as well as the big gray kangaroo and the wallabys. This finishes for the moment the initiation of the young boys. They are led away toward the women's camp and left in a convenient clump of bushes between the men's camp and the women's while the initiation of another age group into a higher grade in the men's association takes place. The young men, who are to see the totemic emblem for the first time, run away from the dance ground because they are to be put on a vegetable diet (see Section H, 3) and suffer the taboo of silence for a period of time. The older men run after them and bring them back. 852
561

4. Meanwhile, at the tail of the snake dance ground, Yurlunggur is in the "python well" of the Liaalaomir people. He can be heard roaring in a very slow rhythm. The young men stand with their heads [262
784]
852

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that he will be allowed to have for twenty-four hours. The basket is placed in the boy's mouth to prevent him from crying and to help him bear the pain. 852 304

The initiates do cry in spite of the basket. When they do, the men call out with a high trill which is supposed to be a snake's voice. The little boys beg to be turned loose. They are laid on top of the supine men and then held firmly so that they cannot move. The men's chorus surrounds the scene of the operation and it is impossible for the women to view this part of the ceremony. Some of the women dance around the men. One man cuts one boy, while at the same time a second individual circumcises the other. A neat operation is performed, and it is seldom that an infection sets in.

After each boy is cut, a man picks him up and runs with him back to the men's ground. After the man has washed his hands thoroughly with water, he warms them over a lighted fire stick. The wound is also washed and warmed by the man's hand.

The foreskin is put in a paper-bark basket filled with water. Later it is taken out and wrapped with paper bark and a pandanus string. It is hung on a basket as one of its pendants. It is supposed to be kept by the father until the boy grows up, when it is given to him. It is improbable that the boy ever receives the basket, but ideally this is the proper method of finally disposing of the foreskin.

6. Just after the circumcision is completed the leader approaches each man who has participated in the Djungguan ceremony and pulls a feather off the latter's body as a sign that the ceremony is over. This also has a magical significance: it is supposed to prevent any illness or other bad luck from coming to each participant because of his part in the "powerful" Djungguan ceremony. (The same idea exists in the leaders' rubbing the back of the dancer in the Gunabihi ceremony.) 852

7. Until this period in the boy's life and during the ceremony until the actual circumcision, the boy is allowed to eat any food that he may obtain, but after this he is not allowed to eat any large game until the rainy season has "made the grass come again." He is not allowed to drink water until the following day; he is told a great flood has covered the earth and made the water salty, the sea has covered the land and there is no fresh water to drink. 262 561 852

Native Interpretation.—When a child is circumcised the snake and the flood are supposed to have come again. Here is a typical statement 852

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that time is represented on the bark tray. The boy is given a piece of kangaroo meat or some other food and an old man says, "That is not kangaroo. You tell me the name of that which you're eating. What is it?" 852 869

An old man sits beside the youth and whispers a totemic name of the animal into the ear of the boy. The boy then calls out this esoteric name as he swallows the food. As he says the totemic name all the men cry out, "Yai!!! yai!!!" The whole list of foods is gone through, the boy eating them and being told the taboo name of each. Even though the food is not represented on the bark tray, its name is told him and another pellet takes the place of the missing edible. During the ritual the little boys are informed that if they impart any of the information they have been given, "something will happen to their mothers," and that the old men will spear them if they inform any of the women or children. They are told that the old men will know by magic if they betray their secrets. All the men insist that a boy would be killed if he gave away the secrets of the men.—When the ritual is finished, the fire and logs are covered with sand and earth, and men and boys return to the main camp. 852 869 626

The newly circumcised boys are kept away from all women and remain with the men until the wound is healed and they can walk and urinate without pain or effort. Then the pubic coverings they have been wearing, the ones in which the women saw them before circumcision, are taken off; a short song is played over them and they are burned, others being placed on the boys to symbolize the change in biological and social status. The boys are watched over most carefully by the men during the entire ceremony, as well as during a period after the circumcision. Some older man is always with them. This attention is given both to keep them away from the women and because it is felt that during a circumcision initiation a boy should have every luxury given him and the best of everything that the group has to offer. 852 [291]

Older boys show greater emotion and expression of pain than the younger ones when they are operated upon. The younger ones stop crying almost immediately after the operation.

3. The older age grade of youths who have been shown the totemic emblem of the python for the first time (see Section F, 4) are put on a vegetable diet for a period determined by the leader of the ceremony, ordinarily about a week. At the end of the period the young men are taken to the men's ceremonial grounds where they are painted by 852 561 262 302

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852 some of the older men with the totemic design of their clan, the
 262 leader and the older men meanwhile singing the totemic names of
 561 the clans, animals, and sacred clan wells over the youths. They can
 302 now eat anything they desire. The taboo of silence (see Section F, 3)
 852 is also removed at this time. The leader of this ceremony, who, as
 431 has been said before, is usually the head of the Liaalaomir clan, is
 always given presents by the newly initiated boys. These presents consist of all varieties of food, weapons and other elements of the material culture. The whole family of the boy, both men and women, help him. Only the old men can participate in the consumption of food that is given in payment.

852 4. The ceremonial trumpet (Yurlunggur) is put back in the
 totemic well of the clan whose leader has been giving the ceremony. It is buried at night in the mud so that the women will not see it when they are at the well. If it is in good condition at the time the next ceremony is held, it will be used for this occasion; if not, it is reburied and a new trumpet made.

852 *Native Interpretation.*—The reference in the native interpretation in
 262 Section E which says a man cannot eat anything when he has blood on him because he is unclean, indirectly explains the superficial reasons for placing the taboo on the older boys.

A general summary of the interpretation of each ritual section will be given in Chapter XI.

THE GUNABIBI CEREMONY

852 A. PRELIMINARIES

1. Mandelprindi, the bull roarer, is made.

2. The young men are chosen for initiation by the leader.

1. The season chosen for the Gunabibi is always the dry period as soon as the food is plentiful, after the luxuriant spear grass has been burned and travel becomes easier. This ceremony lasts from two months to two years. At the discretion of the leaders it may be shortened or indefinitely prolonged. The information that a large group of people is coming from a long distance to participate at the Gunabibi often causes the leader to continue the preliminary stages a month or more while waiting for the visitors.

852 When the ceremonial leaders of the Liaalaomir clan have decided
 534 that it is time to start the Gunabibi ritual, it is usually the younger brother of the Liaalaomir leader who goes out into the men's ground

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796 they did in the first ceremony. They walk with spears in their hands,
535 which, at the moment, symbolizes the yam sticks of the two Djunkgao sisters. They continue until they come to the ring of women, as described in the duni or red-ocher part of the ceremony. The kingfishers also represent the modern Murngin man looking for food and sexual intercourse. In a way, too, they are Wongar yolno. After the kingfishers have performed a dance around the women they thrust the short spears among the group to symbolize the Wongar yolno's original breaking of taboo against sexual relations with women of one's own group; then they return to the men's ceremonial ground.

G. THE BRUSH TURKEY TOTEM IS DANCED AND DISPLAYED

1. The totem emblem of a turkey is danced in the Narra ground.
2. The initiates are shown the totem.

[302] 1. Some distance back from the men's dance ground, groups of men have been painting themselves like turkeys. They represent the brush turkey totem. Fires are built all around the men just as fires are built on the plains when turkeys are hunted. The turkeys dance through the fires while an old man beats the singing sticks and leads them toward the men's dance ground. They carry the totem. One man dances a pantomime of a brush turkey out in the plains.

796 2. Small boys are put at the head of the dance ground and are
561 shown the various lower age-grade types of totems by the old men
784 (see list of totems, pages 39-51). They cannot see the ones that belong
852 to higher age grades. After they have looked upon the totems which have been strongly taboo to them until this time, they must eat only bush food until after they are painted and have made presents to the leader. Looking at the totem serves as an initiation rite. After the boys have seen the totems, all the men dance once more to the main camp, where again the kingfisher ceremony is gone through with the women under their ainmaras.

796 *Native Interpretation.*—"When the turkeys come in, that means by
113 and by the Yiritja are coming up. Those fires are built all around. This is all the same as making a fire in the plain by those Wongar men. When Wongar men built the fires those Wongar turkeys came up too and looked."

H. THE MEN AND WOMEN BATH CEREMONIALLY

1. All the men, women, and children enter the sea and wash themselves.
1. When this is completed the women and children all run into

MURNGIN TOTEMISM

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age-grade sense. Their beards demonstrate their belonging to the mature men's age grade. The red parrot feather decoration on the beards helps to ritualize this symbol of manliness.) 796
773

J. THE HIGHER TOTEMS ARE SHOWN THE OLDER MEN

1. The old men leave the young men and show their higher totems to each other. 796
535

1. Following the ceremony of showing the totems to the older young men, who represent an age-grade stratum of the male division of the tribe higher than the recently initiated boys, iguana is repeated; then follows the sea-water dance which has been described, and finally iguana, with the usual conventional ending of "benbur benbur." 561

Only the older men see the higher rangas. The young men are left and the older men go inside the bush to look at the rangas which only they are allowed to see. The string is taken off all the totemic emblems at this time. This string is presented to members of the opposite moiety, or very frequently, as has been said before, kutara gives it to mari and mari to kutara (they are of the same moiety) as a demonstration of the solidarity of their relationship. If people who are somewhat distant, therefore a bit strange, ask for this ranga string, it arouses a considerable feeling of antagonism in the owner. It is usually said, "Have people lost their heads? Can't they think? We will just give them ordinary food later. We won't give them string." —"If they are very good friends we can give them food, but the food is not given a power name." 796
561
431
616

K. THE EATING OF THE SACRED BREAD, AND CONCLUSION OF THE CEREMONY 796

1. The bread is eaten by those of near kin. 778
2. The string is removed from the emblems and the neophytes are instructed. 514

1. The leader sings over the palm bread (or yams) which is put in the aihes and cooked. He calls out the totem names of the various rangas (kookaburra, banitja, etc.). This is supposed to infuse the bread with the power names of the rangas and make it "just the same as a ranga," which means that the totemic spirit resides within the bread. Only the men who understand can eat this, which means only the men who are near relations and who have been initiated.

The Murngin always eat in this way after all ceremonies. To outside tribes the people say, "This is maraiin that belongs to the Narra,"

CHAPTER XII

MORTUARY RITES

- 56/ I. GENERAL SUMMARY OF THE NATURE OF MURNGIN MOURNING RITES
 77/ THE very elaborate Murngin mortuary rite is the final rite of passage in the life cycle of the individual. The first rite of passage occurs at the individual's "birth," i.e., when the father is mystically informed of the child's arrival in his mother's womb; here the emphasis is on the male parent's changed status in the community by virtue of his consummation of a family of procreation. It is only when he is a big boy that the male child becomes the center of attention in a rite of passage; he then, through an initiatory ritual by which he becomes a part of the sacred world and partially participant in its functions, changes his status from one socially equivalent to a woman's to that of a "young man." The mark is left upon him by the removal of his foreskin at the climactic rite which is purificatory and associated with the reproductive attributes of nature (see Djungguan, et cetera). At later transitions in his age grading he goes through further initiations, *all of which increase his status within the general community by enlarging his contact with the world of the sacred and the totemic spirit.* In his increasing knowledge of the totem and in his participation in the sacred rituals, myths, and mana of the totem he has his attention fixed on the center and focal point of all totemic sacredness, the totemic well. This increase of status in life by ritual initiation is the general age-grade structure. When he is socially an old man he sees the highest grade of totem which lies deepest in the water of the totemic well. There is nothing more he can do in life to come into a deeper and more fundamental contact with the sacred; but death, the final rite of passage, transfers him from all the world of the profane and puts him (his soul) entirely into the world of the sacred with the totem in the totemic well. The age grading, then, throughout his life has been a gradual increase in his sacred participation, with a consequent lessening of his social participation within

MORTUARY RITES

413

the profane (since he gives an increasing proportion of his time to ritual activities), until finally he returns to where he first originated, the totemic well. 561 ● 771

The father's dream at a child's birth is an expression of the relation of the ordinary to the sacred, since the dream announces a soul's entering the world of the living; and the mortuary ceremony is a ritualization of the relation of the once living soul¹ and also of his mourning kin to the world of the sacred and the dead. The mourning rites symbolize the relationship of these two realms in the beliefs of the Murngin. 771

This chapter will first describe, without interpretation except that of the natives, the mortuary rituals and afterwards present interpretative conclusions. It might be stated that when all the field material which is given here was collected the author had no idea of where the facts led, and it was only by an analysis of the material and by relating it to the rest of the social configuration that the general ideas concerning the aboriginal mourning rites were discovered. 128

II. MURNGIN DEATH, MORTUARY AND MOURNING CEREMONIES AND CUSTOMS

When it is believed that a man is very close to death² his relatives gather about him and wail; some of them, in a plaintive voice, sing the gamma water cycle of songs of his moiety and clan, the leader usually beating time on his singing sticks. The dying man is supposed to listen to these songs and to follow their suggestions; if he cannot understand what is being said, it is believed that the spirit of his marikmo (father's father) or his mari will come when he hears, and talk to the soul which is about to leave the body and instruct it on what it has to do. 763 533

"We sing these songs to make that soul a good one, so he won't hurt any of us." Sometimes when a man has been speared and is still alive a song is sung over him to tell him to die in the proper manner and not allow his soul to make any difficulties for those who are alive. A man who has been badly injured in a spear fight and thinks that he is about to die likes to have this singing because it soothes his pain and removes any worry about the disposition of his soul. "That fellow who has been speared says, 'There is no time for me to live now. I am

¹ All Murngin individuals possess two souls: one (warro) which is from the totem well and important, and the other which is a trickster (mokoi). [774]

² See "The Moon and the Parrot Fish," Appendix VIII, Myths, a rather amusing story which accounts for death.

THE ART OF YIRKALLA

(b) DEATH AND BURIAL.

There are three important events in the life of every male aboriginal of Arnhem Land—in fact, in the life of any tribalized Australian aboriginal birth, when he leaves the land of the spirits and enters the every-day world; initiation, when he is admitted into the sacred or ritualistic world, where age makes him increasingly important; and death, when he leaves the every-day world, and again enters into the land of the spirits. 844
881
764
561

Although there are few rituals associated with birth, those of initiation and the later age-graduating ceremonies are long and complicated, for it is by these ceremonies that men are admitted deeper and deeper into the secret life of the tribe.

At death, the burial rituals extend over many weeks, their purpose being not only to send the spirit so happily to its future home that it will not be a danger to the living, but also to allow the living to adjust themselves to their loss. 764
[775]

The burial ceremonies at Yirkalla have three main phases: (i) the ceremonies at death, (ii) the cleansing of the bones, and (iii) the final burial, after which the spirit of the dead leaves for its aboriginal 'heaven'. If the dead are of the *dun* moiety, the spirit goes to Porelko, and if of the *pitjpa*, to Nalkama. [616]
775]

(i) The Ceremonies at Death

When a man dies his relatives gather round the dead body, wailing loudly, the women cutting their scalps with sharpened bones until the blood flows freely. [152]
After a short period of wailing the men form a group apart from the women and chant the long series of songs which belong to the totemic group of their dead companion. Next morning the men proceed with the rites of burial, first by rubbing red ochre over the body of the corpse, and on that painting his totemic design.¹³ The men also make two bark effigies¹⁴ which they put under the arms of the corpse. They explain to him that the effigies are his children, whom they have killed and placed beside him to prevent him being lonely and wishing to return to haunt the living. The corpse is then wrapped in a thick layer of paper-bark and tied with string. [333]
[302]

While all this is being done, other men are erecting a platform of logs about five feet in height and covering it with a layer of leaves. Then, while the men chant another series of totemic songs belonging to the dead man, two aborigines [17]
764

13. This totemic design is the same as that painted on his body during circumcision. See body paintings associated with circumcision, Pl. 126. Warner (1937), pp. 115-16, in his description and interpretation of the mortuary rituals of the Murugin, an adjacent people, records that the totemic design is painted on the body of the dead man so that the spirits, or *Mokoi*, can identify him. [304]

14. Similar to the bark figures, Fig. 654. D. Frazer (1936), p. 59, records: 'In Tahiti . . . the priest took a number of small slips of plantain leaf-stalk, fixed two or three pieces under each arm of the corpse, placed a few on the breast, and then, addressing the corpse, said, "There are your family, there is your child, there is your wife, there is your father, and there is your mother. Be satisfied yonder (that is, in the world of the spirits). Look not toward those who are left in this world." [17]

 THE ABORIGINES OF EAST ARNHAM LAND

779 The aid of these "Muraian," in which are believed to reside the spirits of their tribal ancestors, may be invoked, and I have heard an old man, addressing a group of initiates, declare that he had lived to an old age because he had been true to his "Muraian," which, he said, had protected him from his enemies and generally cared for him. One man told me that when away out at sea in his canoe, and being suddenly overtaken by a violent storm, he had called upon his "Muraian," and by their aid had been brought safely to land.

614 During the preparations for, or the holding of, these
621 ceremonies it is expected that all matters likely to disturb the
688 peace will be carefully avoided. If someone commits an offence
796 during that period it is regarded as an insult to the particular
[778] "Muraian" concerned, and the men of the horde become most
violently angry. In such a case the offender must make liberal
payments to the chief men of the horde, who, in extreme cases,
however, are not satisfied until the offender has been seriously
injured, or even killed.

561 Though at an early age youths are given some information
778 concerning their own "Muraian," no man undertakes the manu-
[887] facture of these sacred objects before middle life, and then only
under the direction of the old men. From time to time, as
opportunity presents itself, a man is shown the "Muraian" of
hordes other than his own. Such knowledge is in no way
compulsory or essential to his taking his full place in the tribal
life, but rather marks an additional stage in his education, and
so increases his influence.

614 It is through these "Muraian" that the only cohesion between
616 the various scattered hordes is obtained. Hordes or clans of the
619 same moiety, though as widely separated as Elcho Island and
778 Blue Mud Bay, hold in reverence the same mythological ancestors,
possess the same "Muraian," and so regard themselves as the
same people.

000 It will be seen, from the above, how wide is the influence of
these totemic beliefs, and how important a place they occupy in
the life of the people. Further brief reference will be made to
them under the heading of Death and Burial Beliefs and Customs.

A [i.e. "NARA" CEREMONIES -- ANALYST]

KUNAPIPI

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however, the people to whom Laintjung had given his sacred designs⁶¹⁶ and *rangga* were sorry for what they had done, and made the "like-⁷⁷³ness" of Banaitja in paperbark bound on a framework of cane. The influence of Laintjung and Banaitja, in spite of their importance, did not cover such a wide area as that of some other Ancestral Beings; and the aborigines account for this by explaining that Banaitja "was killed at an early age, before he had the opportunity of travelling widely throughout this region".^[77]

Most of the great religious myths of this region are associated with the *dua* moiety, the more conservative section; it is the *jiritja*^[77] which embraces new and "alien" ideas and activities. From time to time, fully-initiated *dua* and *jiritja* men are shown the "high"⁷⁷³ *rangga*, and through the years they become increasingly familiar with the complex ritual. This admission to sacred knowledge, however, is not thought comparable to an initiation or age-grading⁶¹⁶ ceremony; it is more in the nature of a revelation through which they become acquainted with the inner substance of religious thought and expression. The *dua* Wauwalak myth, on the other hand, is of general importance, and is associated with the three sacred "age-grading" ceremonies of this north-eastern region. There is also much sacred ritual not concerned with age-grading. Both *dua* and *jiritja*⁵⁶¹ men take part in this, and it incorporates some purely *jiritja* songs⁷⁹⁶ belonging to separate cycles.^[533]

The two Wauwalak sisters are associated with the concept of⁷⁷³ fertility, owing mainly to their connection with birth, after-birth⁷⁹⁶ blood, and menstruation. The latter receives a great deal of attention in Yirrkalla thought. Aboriginal women are all potential^[841] Wauwalaks; and a great deal of their behaviour, particularly at puberty, and when menstruation ceases at pregnancy, is said to be based on that of the Two Sisters. The Wauwalak myth is most important to these north-eastern Arnhem Landers, and they make frequent references to it. It has, as mentioned, far more general application than have the Djanggawul and Laintjung cycles; and the three separate ceremonies which concern it here are each of a different nature. The commonest is the *djunggawon*, used primarily for initiation; ideally, it extends over a couple of months, and includes^[881] in addition to circumcision and camp dancing, a certain amount of ritual which is not fully revealed, as in the case of the Djanggawul. The second of these three ceremonies is the *kunapipi*, which will be dealt with in the following chapters. The third is the *ngu:rlmak* ceremony, performed to-day only at rare intervals. It is considered to be far more important than either the *djunggawon* or the *kunapipi*, but less so than the Djanggawul and Laintjung *dua* and *jiritja* *nara* rituals.

There are also a number of subsidiary ceremonies, related in some degree to these two main cycles, but not by any means so outstanding.

CHAPTER III

MYTHOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE KUNAPIPI

773 The myth that substantiates Kunapipi ritual in this north-eastern
 776 same myth (as mentioned in Chapter I c) serves to explain two other
 794 indigenous rituals, the age-grading *djunggawon* ceremony, and the
 [561] "higher" religious ritual of *ngu:rlmak*. Each of these three cere-
 monies, the *djunggawon*, the *kunapipi* and the *ngu:rlmak*, empha-
 sizes some particular feature of this myth. But at the same time, to
 understand thoroughly the Kunapipi ritual and symbolism it is
 necessary to be acquainted with the complete Wauwalak myth.
 Even then, certain aspects must be interpreted, according to Aborigi-
 nal explanations, before their meaning can become apparent.
 Traditional symbolism in ritual, through long years of constant
 repetition, becomes so stylized that the original intent is sometimes
 obscured; it is often necessary, therefore, to interpret on the basis
 not only of mythology, but also of comparison with similar actions
 and symbols in other regions. However, in this small study we are
 concerned not so much with theoretical analysis, as with recording
 the structure and basis of the cult in this particular area, assisted by
 a glance at its expression in two neighbouring groups.

[616] In north-eastern Arnhem Land, where most of the indigenous
 [184] religious doctrine is expressed through the *Djanggawul dua* and the
Laintjung-Banaitja jiritja cycles, the Wauwalak series is not the most
 important. Again, to understand fully the importance of this con-
 cept of fertility it is necessary to realize the place of the *Djanggawul*
Brother and Sisters in *Yirrkalla* sacred life, for they were responsible
 in the first place for the birth of the Wauwalak. The power of
 fructification, however, has been transmitted to the Two Wauwalak
Sisters (*vide* Chapters I and II) with the introduction of the *Kunapipi*.

562 It is relevant to mention, in this context, that women play an
 794 important part in all sacred ritual in north-eastern Arnhem Land,
 796 where many of the rites are concerned with the reproductive function
 773 of womankind, and of female Ancestral (or Spirit) Beings. Women
 to-day are acquainted, although in many cases somewhat imper-
 fectly, with the background of sacred ceremony and the underlying
 doctrines. Indeed, men stress the fact that in the Dreaming Period
 women initially possessed all sacred ritual, and lost it only through

773 to these aborigines, is not just passive reliance on the Ancestral
 796 Beings, an inertia based on the hope that "something is bound to
 turn up" if they wait long enough. They must do their part to ensure
 the action of the Ancestral Beings; and their part is the ritual
 re-enactment of the relevant myth. This releases the "power" (or
dal) inherent in the Ancestral Beings. This *dal* then finds full expres-
 sion, and fertility is assured.

Thus the myth is thought to express the intentions of the Ancestral
 Beings, who possess the power to carry them out; and this power is
 [805] released (or brought to bear) by sacred ritual. It arranges the seasons,
 [789] maintains an adequate supply of food, and ensures the continuance
 of the group as a whole.

Before we proceed with the Kunapipi ritual, it is necessary to
 relate the final part of the Wauwalak myth, explaining the way in
 which this ritual was obtained and handed down from *wongar* times.

The three rituals, of which only one is to be treated here, are
 grouped together in terms of kinship ties. The *djunggawon*, an age-
 [561] grading ceremony, is called *kutu*, son, and so is its principal ritual
 [534] object, the long *julunggul* wooden "trumpet". The *ngu:rlmak*,
 mainly religious in character and open only to adult postulants, is
 termed *ha:pa*, father, and so is its ceremonial hollow log *uwar*
 "drum". The *kunapipi* is *mari* (mother's mother's brother), like its
 [601] main ritual emblem, the *jehmalandji*. Although the relationship term
 of *mari* signifying the *kunapipi* is one that normally denotes age (that
 is, in the grandparents' generation), it is less important from the
 point of view of sacredness than the *ngu:rlmak*, said to be the major
 ritual of the trilogy. Sometimes, however, the *ngu:rlmak* is spoken of
 as "the father of the *kunapipi* side", while the *kunapipi* and *djungga-
 won* are classified together. But in practice it seems that, irrespective
 of the terminology of *mari*, the Kunapipi is really of secondary
 importance.

796 All the Wauwalak-Julunggul ceremonies belong to the *dua* clans
 616 or linguistic groups, and are under the direction of *dua* moiety
 totemic headmen; but members of the *jiritja* moiety assist in the
 dancing, singing, and making of ritual objects, and may even include
 certain of their own particular dances based on purely *jiritja* myth
 cycles. *Dua* ceremonial leaders, however, are recognized as the prin-
 cipal custodians of indigenous ritual, for they possess not only the
 Wauwalak but also the Djanggawul. In contrast to the more con-
 servative *dua* groups, the *jiritja* have incorporated introduced
 themes into their ritual life.

- [113] 1. Vide R. and C. Berndt, *Secular Figures of North-East Arnhem Land*,
American Anthropologist, 1949, Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 213-222, with plates;
 Discovery of Pottery in North-Eastern Arnhem Land. *Journal of the Royal
 Anthropological Institute*, Vol. LXXVII, Part 2; and R. Berndt, *Badu,
 Islands of the Spirits, Oceania*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, pp. 93-103; R. and C.
 Berndt, *Arnhem Land, Its History and Its People*, for publication.

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796 The ceremony begins when messengers are first sent out to the
 [203] various camps to notify other groups, and when the chosen initiates
 • [561] (young boys who have gone through the *djunggawon* age-grading
 ceremony) are taken away from their home camp. But it may be
 some time before the more serious parts of the rituals can com-
 mence.

796 In the meantime, while awaiting the visitors, the *dua* headmen and
 778 the Kunapipi leader go out from the main camp and make a cere-
 monial ground or "centre" (that is "Sandy" or "Sunday") place;
 this entails the clearing of a ground which the men are in the habit of
 using for such a purpose. The Kunapipi leader makes a bullroarer,
 [534] its cord attached to a stick by which it will be swung; its painting and
 [533] anointing with blood (as described above) are accompanied by sing-
 ing.

796 Some time afterwards, the first Kunapipi ceremony takes place in
 the main camp, "to let the women know that it is beginning". Men
 533 sing "outside" Wauwalak and "outside" Kunapipi songs which
 535 summarize preceding events, while the women dance. These are
 called *gudambiri*, or ordinary secular dances; although they do not
 pretend to be really sacred, they are nevertheless most important, for
 they put everyone into the mood for the coming rituals. Non-sacred
garma (or clan songs) are also sung and danced. These may continue
 for weeks before the main rituals commence: but towards the end,
 the men, women, and children sing the "outside" Kunapipi songs
 with their rapid rhythm.

796 Out in the bush on the sacred ground⁴ a man swings the bull-
 534 roarer. There is a hush; the deep-throated sound of Julunggul is
 heard by all in the camp. In answer, the Kunapipi leader calls, fol-
 lowed by the cries of all the women: "they cry out just like those two
 Wauwalak, for Julunggul is sneaking towards the camp, as he did
 towards the *murlk*". *Jiritja* men answer, too, symbolizing *jiritja*
 snakes.

796 Almost immediately after this, the *jiritja* men take out the young
 881 boys to meet the Julunggul (that is, if they have not been sent away
 to other camps; if they have gone, this part of the ceremony takes
 place when they return, with the visitors who are to participate).
 [302] The boys have been smeared with red-ochre and arm blood and,

[778] 4. The sacred ground is in the shape of a triangle. This is similar to the *djungga-*
won dancing ground, and is said to resemble Julunggul's body. One side of the
 elongated triangle is classified as *dua*, and the opposite side as *jiritja*; but
 this is only for ritual purposes. At the apex of the triangle a hole is dug,
 symbolizing Muruwul: this is the *nungguru*. The "inside" meaning of this
 triangular dancing place is said to be the Mother's uterus: men go into the
 uterus for rituals. This conforms to the meaning of the ground in other
 regions, for example, in western-central Northern Territory. The Kunapipi
 ground is arranged differently from that of the *djunggawon*, but retains its
 fundamental shape.

Significance of the Djanggawul

Long before the actual rituals commence, men go out to the sacred ground to prepare the objects. The wooden poles and posts are removed from their hiding places in the water or mud, and weeks are spent in re-painting them. Women are asked to prepare long feathered strings, which are never directly given to the men, but always 'stolen' by them. This is conventional behaviour, and relates to the Djanggawul Brother and his companions' stealing the sacred *rungga*, bags and so on from the Two Sisters in the beginning (see Chapter 2). The preliminary preparations take weeks, and are accompanied by singing and invocations. Neophytes are brought in from time to time, and their chests painted with sacred clan designs: they continue to wear these when they return to the camp, and never wash or rub them off, but allow them to fade naturally. In this way the neophytes contract many ritual obligations, since they must recompense their 'initiators'—that is, those who are revealing the mysteries to them. They must also observe a number of tabus relating to their general behaviour, and to the partaking of food.¹ Later, the same neophytes are shown the *rungga* emblems and their designs, and the meanings are explained to them. [302]

By this time, the neophytes have reached the stage when they are regarded as being eligible to witness the first ceremonies. The sacred ground has been prepared, the shade erected and the objects completed. A sacred aura is now said to pervade the ritual ground, and the spiritual presence of the Djanggawul is assured. [584]

The ceremonies which now begin are not seen completely by those neophytes who are brought to the ground for the first time. Years may pass before the complete series has been revealed to them, and it is not as a rule until they have reached middle age that they may take an active part in the ritual. Sometimes, however, younger men who show particular aptitude for religious discussion, dancing and singing, are accepted much earlier. There is always a need for young and energetic dancers and actors; and the older men, by allowing the younger men a degree of active participation, cement their adherence to the cult and so reinforce their own position. But even when younger men dance or act, older men are the organizers, and it is their duty to show the way to the other. They, the older men, are always acknowledged to possess greater knowledge of these matters, to be in a position to impart that knowledge. The older men, when they do dance or act, are almost invariably more proficient than the younger men; and although there is a tendency to-day to allow the younger men a greater measure of participation, it still takes years before a neophyte may be legitimately classified as an initiate. [561]

¹ The economic aspect of the *new* rituals cannot, unfortunately, be dealt with here.

182 a man's or woman's own horde with whom he or she comes
 431 into daily contact. They extend also to members of
 461 other hordes and are emphasised strongly on occasions
 602 when people from distant groups to whom the kinship
 [574] organisation is extended, come as visitors. For a young
 man, such obligations are intense, and to discharge them
 he is obliged to keep up an almost continuous stream of
 presents, which entails constant work.

182 With each successive stage of initiation it is obligatory
 431 for him to make gifts to the old men of the clan group into
 461 which he is being initiated. This may become very irksome
 626 and may even reach a stage when no matter how hard he
 561 works he is unable completely to discharge all his obligations,
 so laying himself open to the fear of reprisals, such as
 [754] visitation by *kälka* (sorcerers who kill by the use of magic)
 or by other agencies. Fear of the use of secret methods of
 reprisal is a very real one, and provides, for a man, one of
 the strongest inducements to work, to keep pace with his
 obligations, and so to give no cause for resentment.

431 In those ceremonies such as the *kunabibbi* and *nulmark*
 561 which transcend clan and tribal boundaries, and are not
 796 restricted to, or regarded as the proprietary right of, a
 614 small group such as a clan, but are practised widely throughout
 778 the territory, these obligations are less onerous. In
 others, of the type called *märdai'in*, the initiation ceremonies
 carried out by each clan or group of clans sharing the same
 totems, at which its sacred totems are revealed, the burden of the
 gifts or payments is a heavy one. The internal solidarity of these
 small groups is intense, and their *märdai'in* or *ränga*—the secret
 name for the objects which represent the *mälli*, the "shade" or
 "spirit" of the totemic ancestors themselves—are jealously
 guarded. These *ränga* are very sacred and are regarded as
 dangerous to the

uninitiated because they are endowed with a force called *marr* (*miana*)¹⁸, and large presentations of food and *gerri* are obligatory to all those to whom these *ränga* have been revealed and who thus share in the solidarity of the group.

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Such obligations recur at every stage in each initiation, and following upon each ceremony a man must make a big ceremonial presentation of objects of value, *gerri*, such as fine spears, belts of human hair and especially gifts of the type that are appropriate to the geographical quarter (*kumur*, page 67), within the ceremonial exchange cycle in which his clan territory lies.

If a man comes from a group some distance away, and the occasion is an important one, a dugout canoe (*lippa*) may be presented. This is a big gift and highly valued. It is important to realise that there is no attempt to assess the value of these things but rather to create a feeling of goodwill, to leave behind a good impression, which a man knows will enhance his prestige and react in his favour in future transactions. He knows also that he builds up goodwill by a reputation for generosity and that this in turn may mean that he will be selected as the recipient of the *wärna*, the armlets of opossum fur string or *lindiritj* (Lorikeet's feathers) and other paraphernalia

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¹⁸ *Marr* is a kind of spiritual force or "power" very like the Polynesian concept of *mana*, which underlies social and ceremonial life. It occurs in all sacred objects and is the "force" or "power" which makes them dangerous to the uninitiated or profane and a source of strength and "power" to the fully initiated members of the clan or other organisation. *Marr* is not strength or power, danger or sacredness, alone, although it may be each and any of these things. It is the power which makes a *ränga*, a totemic object, sacred, which makes a dead body dangerous, and which brings good or bad "luck" in hunting. *Marr* is the force which makes a man *tjämbait*, i.e. successful or "lucky" in the pursuit of game.

which goes on. But while these obligations impose a heavy burden, especially upon a young man who must attend a long series of ceremonies with a vista of payments to be met, the ceremonies in turn confer some benefit upon him, although this may be indirect. They carry increased social status and prestige which in turn bring gradual liberation from some of the irksome tabus which influence almost every act of a young man. 182
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Although on these occasions the immediate burden of gathering vegetable food falls on his female relatives, especially upon his mother and sisters, this does not relieve the initiate of his own personal obligations, but rather intensifies them. He must now redouble his efforts in hunting to enable him in turn to supply his women relations with fish, kangaroo, "sugar bag" or wild honey, in order to retain their goodwill. A man's success as a hunter depends not only on his ability to stalk and his skill with the spear but also on his capacity to make, and to maintain in serviceable condition, his hunting weapons, his fishing lines and nets and sometimes also a canoe. So initiation, especially initiation into the jealously-guarded clan totems (*mārdai'in*) of the small groups which characterise the social organisation of North-eastern Arnhem Land, with their intense solidarity and quick resentment,¹⁹ sets up a long train of social obligations—each with a definite economic import—each requiring gift and counter gift, and furnishing the motive for work, the urge for production both of food and *gerri*. 182
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¹⁹ Just as generous presentations of *gerri* (material wealth) and *yāta* (food) promote goodwill, so tardiness in the discharge of these obligations may lead to avenging expeditions and interclan feuds. A man who is unpopular, or who is notorious for his carelessness in these matters is more likely to be named as the victim when a scapegoat is sought to avenge a death or wrong. [576]
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777 the fine powdery dust (*künno*),²⁰ of the ceremonial ground,
 778 and declared that the turtles were therefore "*yarkomirri*"
 [796] (lit. "bearing a name", i.e. sacred). A rite was performed to
 remove the tabu, before the flesh could be eaten by the
 [431] uninitiated. Even then those people, other than members
 of the totemic group, who ate the flesh, were called upon
 to make a payment of the type previously described, called
tudoit, in this case to the fully initiated members.

182 Reference has been made to the obligation to hunt which
 [461] a man incurs in order to provide animal food for the
 431 women upon whom he must depend for the large quan-
 • [561] tities of food which he requires to meet the periodic
 [796] ceremonial presentations which mark almost every stage
 606 of initiation as well as the termination of each critical stage
 604 in his life. This obligation is especially stressed in his
 relationship with his *mukul rumaro*²¹ (potential mother-

²⁰ *Künno* is really ash, fine, white, powdery wood ash. This man
 was said to be "*kähya künnomirri*", "skin with ashes", because the
 white dust of the ceremonial ground was still on his body and
 carried its *marr*.

[601] ²¹ As this paper may be read by many economists who may not
 have anthropological training, some reference to the kinship system
 of the aborigines may be of assistance. Under the system which is
 called "classificatory", the terms of relationship allied to the family
 and to near kin are extended to a number of people with whom
 no actual genetic relationship can be traced but who are grouped or
 classified with own kin. A man applies the term "father" not only
 to his own father but to all the people his father calls "brother" and
 this system is extended indefinitely. These terms expressing relation-
 ship are used instead of personal names, as terms of address. This
 system has the effect of reducing greatly the number of actual terms
 in use. But kinship terms are not mere names, for each carries with it
 a set pattern of behaviour. In Arnhem Land a man applies the term
mukul rumaro (mother-in-law) to the daughter of his mother's
 mother's brother. He knows that he may look to this woman to
 provide him with a wife or wives and the pattern of behaviour

in-law), and with the particular *kanwāl* (mother's brother) who is the husband of this woman to whom he applies the term *muḵul*. Before the potential mother-in-law has a daughter, even before she is pregnant, he may begin to send her gifts of food. These progressive gifts have a cumulative effect and build up goodwill. They are divided into two series, to each of which a special name is applied. The first series are *milmarr*, while those given to the mother-in-law after the birth of a daughter are known by a different term, *mundur*. As my informant said, "that is hard work for me; she pays me back," i.e. by giving her daughter to me in marriage. They believe that this special form of giving has more than a "goodwill" effect, and that *marr*, the spiritual force or power to which I have referred, goes with the food, so that it has a greater significance than the white man would attach to it—and much greater than its mere value as food. The same applies to the special ceremonial gifts of food and *gerri* which are presented by the novitiate at various stages during his initiation to clan totems and to other cults. Implicit in this form of giving is the feeling which is even more important than "goodwill", that it places the recipient under an obligation to repay. To remain under such a debt is to accept a feeling of inferiority, of shame and humiliation.

In discussing the "drive", the urge to carry out the exacting hard work (which in a fully organised aboriginal society is everywhere in evidence) I have stressed the obligation which a man feels to reciprocate with a gift of at toward *muḵul rumaro* is one of rigid avoidance. He may not speak to her nor she to him, but he has very definite obligations towards her (*muḵul rumaro*), including the obligation to provide her with certain animal food, with progressive gifts of a special type described above.